

Written Worship Service 5th September 2021

Welcome to worship whenever and wherever you are reading or watching this service. My name is Joan Bailey and I'm a local preacher in the Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit.

A call to worship

Psalm 1:1,2

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

StF 36 There's a quiet understanding

There's a quiet understanding
when we're gathered in the Spirit,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.

There's a love we feel in Jesus,
there's a manna that he feeds us,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.

And we know when we're together,
sharing love and understanding,
that our brothers and our sisters
feel the oneness that he brings.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
for the way you love and feed us,
for the many ways you lead us;
thank you, thank you, Lord;
thank you, thank you, Lord.

Tedd Smith (b. 1927)

Let us pray

All knowing God,
you are wise beyond our understanding,
Your thoughts are higher than our thoughts,

your ways and actions are holier than ours can ever be.

Loving God,
we recognise that all your dealings with us,
the care, the answers to prayer
and sometimes the chastisements,
come from your love.

Teaching God, you instruct us in your ways
and place your values within us.
We praise you that your grace reaches to us,
to show us the right way,
and that your forgiveness is freely given,
even when we fall short of those values you teach.

Forgive us when, in our relationships,
we deny you by acting
foolishly,
thoughtlessly,
recklessly.

We confess to you now
those things we should have done
but did not do.....
and those things we did
which we should not have done.....

Forgiving God.

Thank you.

Amen

Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom,
the power and the glory
are yours now and forever. Amen

Today I'd like to talk about 3 things - values,
relationships and changing times.

Fundamental to each of our personalities are the values that we hold dear, the beliefs that are important to us and the things which cause us to act in a certain way. They develop from the culture in which we live, from the way we were brought up and also from our own thinking and reflecting on the world around us. We all value our achievements and the status that brings us but it's more than this isn't it? Because our values radically affect our relationships with other people.

If you are reading or listening to this the chances are that you and I share some of the same values because we share the same beliefs, we try to follow the example of Jesus and we recognise those values in each other even when we have differences about exactly how things should be done and even, sadly, when we don't act as we know we should.

Fundamentally, when the chips are down, when bad things happen or we see someone close in need there is no question, no need for discussion about what is the right thing to do. We may not always immediately follow the right path but we know what it is and will always be drawn back to our enduring values.

Our first reading is from Proverbs, that record of Israelite wisdom which we still recognise today. This short section shows the importance of our relationships. It's about the right use of power and the universal truth that all the riches in the world are of less importance than good reputation, based on our actions and relationships. This passage is set for today in our lectionary but the same message rings out

throughout the Bible in the law, the prophets, shown in Jesus and worked out in the early church.

Proverbs 22:1-2 New Living Translation

22 Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold.

The rich and poor have this in common:

The Lord made them both.

Those who plant injustice will harvest disaster, and their reign of terror will come to an end.

Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor.

Don't rob the poor just because you can, or exploit the needy in court.

For the Lord is their defender.

He will ruin anyone who ruins them.

Our next reading from Mark sees Jesus taking his disciples quite a long way to the area around Tyre, almost to the coast. Why it was necessary to go so far we are not told but we could surmise that he simply wanted time alone with his disciples. He had so much to teach them and time was running out.

In the second part of the reading Jesus returns to the ten towns near Galilee. Both of these areas are away from the main centre of Jerusalem and brought the group into contact with those outside or on the margins of Judaism, people deeply unpopular because of their history and dealings with past enemies. Those considered unclean. Those considered not to share the same values. Those with whom it was considered wrong to mix freely.

Mark 7:24-37 New Living Translation

²⁴ Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know

which house he was staying in, but he couldn't keep it a secret. ²⁵ Right away a woman who had heard about him came and fell at his feet. Her little girl was possessed by an evil spirit, ²⁶ and she begged him to cast out the demon from her daughter.

Since she was a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia, ²⁷ Jesus told her, "First I should feed the children—my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs."

²⁸ She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are allowed to eat the scraps from the children's plates."

²⁹ "Good answer!" he said. "Now go home, for the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ And when she arrived home, she found her little girl lying quietly in bed, and the demon was gone.

³¹ Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns. ³² A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him.

³³ Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, "*Ephphatha*," which means, "Be opened!" ³⁵ Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!

³⁶ Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. ³⁷ They were completely amazed and said again and again, "Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak."

StF 158 Lord you sometimes speak in wonders

Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders,
unmistakable and clear,
mighty signs that show your presence,
overcoming doubt and fear.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders.

Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,
still and small and scarcely heard;
only those who want to listen
catch the all-important word.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers.

Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,
through our loud and noisy day;
we can know and trust you better
when we quietly wait and pray.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in silence.

Lord, you often speak in Scripture,
words that summon from the page,
shown and taught us by your Spirit
with fresh light for every age.
O Lord, you often speak in Scripture.

Lord, you always speak in Jesus,
always new yet still the same:
teach us now more of our Saviour,
make our lives display his Name.
O Lord, you always speak in Jesus.
Christopher Idle (b. 1938)

As we prepare ourselves once more to reach out and welcome refugees from conflict we know, our values tell us, that this is the right thing to do. But, when the heat of the moment has passed, when we find the differences between us, when the needy become a longer term demand and a drain

on our resources then perhaps we are less enthusiastic.

We are challenged by the stranger among us. One of the dangers of a group sharing the same values is that those very values become fixed in habit and in law and the habits and the laws limit our good works and we may begin to reject those not part of our group.

We look to Jesus for an example and find him always reaching out in love to teach, heal and welcome anyone who approaches him. Or so we think - but then we are surprised if not shocked by his reply to the Syro-Phoenician woman who is definitely an outsider to the group of disciples and to Jesus. Perhaps even more surprising, it is Jesus, and not the disciples who rejects her and quite insultingly too.

We ask what this means and we cannot be sure and Mark does not give us much to go on. Not for the first time, Jesus enters into dialogue with an outsider and is persuaded to heal her daughter. Her answer was clever, she took the insult about being a dog and turned it to justify receiving what she asked for from Jesus.

One way of looking at this might be to see that Jesus is entering changing times. Indeed he came to stir things up and change things. He has come to the Jews, to work within their beliefs and law, but to free them from the strictures and misunderstandings that have grown up and limited it, making them into a small exclusive group, hard on themselves and harder still on others beyond their group. Now Jesus sees that the need stretches much wider and that there are many others who asking for his help his help and that where there is need there is the need to meet it.

Jesus and the disciples then move back to a more familiar area , 'the ten towns' where again they meet people on the fringes, outside their own

group and again Jesus carries out a healing. This time freeing a deaf and dumb man to hear and to speak. We're on more familiar ground here as we see Jesus acting as we expect. In the description we see his sensitivity and compassion as, working away from the crowd, alone with the man, with gestures that a deaf man could understand, he frees him from his disability.

The key word is 'be open' as his ears are opened to hear and his mouth to speak. Perhaps the message for us is to be open to what we hear, even if that is new and difficult, and to speak the truth even if at first that truth seems different. In spite of Jesus asking that nothing be said, the word spread. I suppose any of us witnessing such a miracle would want to talk about it. And so Jesus continued to be at the centre of noisy demanding crowds. And so the work goes on. Jesus' core values, his faith in his work, his relationship with the people he meets is in line with all the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures and yet so often we find him challenged to push the boundaries and reinterpret. To bring the practice of those values in line with the love of God which is seen through all his actions.

We find it difficult, even shocking, to understand his first refusal and harsh words when asked for help by the Gentile woman. This isn't the Jesus we expect and it doesn't fit with what we feel we should do in reaching out to *everyone*. The woman in her response showed faith in Jesus in spite of being outside his group. Could it be that Jesus was showing his disciples something new in his actions which points forwards to the early church moving out among the Gentiles – changing times?

We live in a constantly changing world, our values are challenged and relationships can be difficult. Our last hymn said:

'Lord, you always speak in Jesus,

always new yet still the same.'

So how does this affect us? There is a lot in that 'always new but still the same'. As Jesus was in his encounters, we are challenged too.

Nevertheless, following his example and teaching, we pray for help and, obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit, reassess and act without losing our core values, showing God's love in all relationships and moving on, answering the challenge of changing times.

So let us commit ourselves with the words of the next hymn.

StF 702 I will speak out

I will speak out for those who have no voices;

I will stand up for the rights of all the oppressed;

I will speak truth and justice;

I'll defend the poor and the needy;

I will lift up the weak in Jesus' name.

2 I will speak out for those who have no choices;

I will cry out for those who live without love;

I will show God's compassion

to the crushed and broken in spirit;

I will lift up the weak in Jesus' name.

Dave Bankhead, Ray Goudie, Sue Rinaldi and Steve Bassett

Let us pray

Take time with these prayers and, if you wish, when this service is over return to them again.

Let us prayerfully imagine the globe, our world wrapped in the loving hands of God.

Let us find the tiny dot in which we live and pray for those we love and also for those close to us for whom we have a special concern. Name them before our loving God and express your concerns for them.....

Loving Lord, in the safety of your hands I pray for the world.

Let us find, on this globe, the country in which we live and pray for those who govern us. Ask that God's wisdom and God's values influence their decisions. Pray for our schools as they return, for the NHS preparing for a busy winter, pray for all institutions, care homes, prisons and for businesses seeking to serve our needs in changing times.....

Loving Lord, in the safety of your hands I pray for the world.

From our country take prayerful threads of love to each place in the world where there is suffering, Afghanistan and the countries bordering it, for Haiti, for victims of Hurricanes and floods, for all those still mourning the victims of 9/11.....

Loving Lord, in the safety of your hands I pray for the world.

Loving Lord we bring these prayers to you knowing you already know each individual who suffers, each aid worker, each one of us who prays now wondering what to do.

Loving Lord, in the safety of your hands I pray for the world.

Now thank God that we are held in his care and that nothing is beyond his knowing.

Thanks be to God

Amen.

StF 662 Have you heard God's voice

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve, though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.

Jacqueline G. Jones

Benediction

May the Lord of strong and stable relationships
help us to live wisely and in peace.

May the Son guide our paths.

May the Holy Spirit lead us into wisdom. Amen